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Testimony of Molly Naples of the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center
IN SUPPORT OF SB 209,
AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE REACH OUT AND READ PROGRAM
Before the Connecticut General Assembly's Committee on Children
February 5, 2015

Dear Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children,

I want to take this opportunity to give my testimony in support of SB 209. My name is Molly Naples, and I am a pediatrician at the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. I am completing my residency training this spring, and have spent the last three years treating the children of the greater Hartford area. More than 85% of the population served at this clinic is on Medicaid. For many of our families, providing the basic necessities of life proves a daily challenge. Understandably, but quite unfortunately, things such as books for their children are not a priority. Reach Out and Read is an invaluable service that we are able to provide to our families.

As a pediatrician, I feel personally responsible to provide the best care I can to my patients. It is well known that reading to children early in life helps promote language development, literacy, and brain development. Studies have shown that children of low-income families are at the highest risk of reading failure. They are typically 12-14 months below national norms for language and pre-reading skills at the time of entering kindergarten. Most of brain development occurs before the age of five, so often they rarely catch up to their more affluent peers.

With Reach Out and Read, we are able to provide our low-income families with the gift of reading. Studies have shown that children served by the Reach Out and Read program show increased scores on vocabulary tests by the age of two. Reach Out and Read allows us to educate our parents on the importance of reading and provide the tools to do so. I took care of a 3 year old boy who came in for his yearly well child visit. His mother voiced concern about his vocabulary. On further questioning, it became apparent that she rarely read to him because she could not afford books. When I returned with a book for her from the Reach Out and Read program, her eyes filled with tears. On a subsequent visit, she was eager to share how she read the book with her son every night and how much they both enjoyed that bedtime ritual. She and her son could not wait for his next well child visit so they could add another book to their new routine. Over the next year, as mom read more to him, his vocabulary blossomed.

I encourage the committee to support SB 209. As a Pediatrician, and mother to an infant, I cannot overstate the importance reading has on brain development. I myself read to my son daily, and I strongly believe every parent should have the same opportunity. Our families all deserve the gift of reading. Reach Out and Read will continue to provide the support to help our children reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Molly Naples, MD